



MERRY HILL IN £100m REVAMP

Report by Simon Penfold

MERRY Hill is about to undergo the biggest transformation since it was built more than 25 years ago, as owners intu plan to spend around £100 million over the next five years.

Work on remodelling the shopping centre's bus station starts in January and talks have taken place with potential tenants for the vacant BHS store at the centre.

Matthew Roberts, chief financial officer at intu and the man in charge of its 17 shopping centres across the UK, said: "The pace of change here is accelerating. We bought Merry Hill because we think it provides a great opportunity. I would hope this can be one of our best performing assets in the next five to 10 years, if not the best."

Intu bought half of Merry Hill from Westfield for £407.7m in 2014 and purchased the other half from Australian investment group QIC for £410m this summer.

It also owns part of the surrounding retail park and a section of the neighbouring Waterfront office complex.

Mr Roberts said intu was looking to bring a new car showroom to the retail park, while there would also be refurbishment work at the Waterfront. But he predicted most of the £100m would be spent within the shopping centre itself.

Restaurants

"We have done some of the basics, given it a lick of paint and installed some new escalators near the Asda supermarket," said Mr Roberts. There would also be work on improving the look of the centre's entrances.

Bringing in new restaurants was also a key focus, he said, as Merry Hill becomes more of a leisure destination for families.

Across intu's 17 UK shopping centres around 13 per cent of space was given over to leisure, particularly restaurants.

"Here at intu Merry Hill it is about half that," said Mr Roberts, who said the store space left vacant by the collapse of BHS is currently the subject of talks with potential tenants.

Sainsbury's has revealed it will quit following Christmas, after 27 years at the centre.

"We are sad to see Sainsbury's go," said Mr Roberts, but the space would be "attractive to a number of other retailers".

He said store chains wanted bigger 'flagship' units, like the new Top Shop and Top Man shop at the centre.

CHARLEY'S LOCKS LOPPED FOR CANCER CHARITY



Charley Mantle, left, who works at the Cradley Heath branch of the West Brom, with Liam Taylor, from Toni & Guy's in Wolverhampton

IT was a case of hair today and gone tomorrow for warm-hearted Charley Mantle, who works at the Cradley Heath branch of building society the West Brom in the town's High Street.

Charley had her long locks chopped off in the name of charity.

The 23-year-old from Kingswinford raised £500 for Teenage Cancer Trust, helping the West Brom break through the £20,000 barrier in just six months of supporting its nominated charity.

Charley also donated her hair to the Little

Princess Trust, a charity which provides wigs and hair pieces for children suffering from cancer.

She said: "I really wanted to do something for charity and the two organisations which benefitted are brilliant causes."

Exciting

"It was the first time I've had my hair cut in a good number of years and around 15 inches came off and was donated to Little Princess Trust."

"I was pretty nervous having so much cut

off but, at the same time, it was exciting to be involved."

Charley's charity cut took place at Toni & Guy's, in Victoria Street, Wolverhampton.

Charley added: "The guys there were fantastic. They did the cut for free to ensure we could raise as much as possible for Teenage Cancer Trust and I'm very grateful for that."

Teenage Cancer Trust is the only UK charity dedicated to improving the quality of life and chances of survival for young people with cancer aged between 13 and 24.

HEALTH

Second city ranked third in stress table

RESEARCH has found that Birmingham is the third most stressed place in the UK. Aviva carried out research into the proportion of people in the UK who have taken time off work with stress. Birmingham ranked third with 36 per cent, the same amount as London.

A total of 25 per cent of people have taken time off work with stress but blamed it on a physical illness, the research found.

Plymouth is home to the highest proportion in the UK who have taken time off work with stress, at 39 per cent. Norwich has been ranked lowest at 25 per cent.

CANALS

Campaign to tackle the towpath tippers

SHOPPING trolleys, tyres and traffic cones – even a submerged car – are among hundreds of items found dumped in the Black Country's canals.

The Canal and River Trust has revealed that the problem across the waterways of the Black Country and Birmingham is costing more than £100,000 to tackle.

Now the trust is launching a new campaign to clamp down on the illegal fly-tipping by encouraging the public to report the towpath tippers.

COUNCIL

Anger at £50,000 cost for gadgets

OPPOSITION leaders at Dudley Council have hit out at the cash-strapped authority for paying 'extortionate costs' to fund councillors' IT equipment.

Councillor Paul Brothwood, leader of the UKIP party in Dudley, is calling for an 'immediate review' of Dudley Council's spending of almost £50,000.

Devices such as iPads, smartphones and a digital camera are bought for councillors using the money, alongside home broadband and mobile SIM cards.

The Labour-run council says it is 'essential' for councillors to have 'swift access' to communications in the digital age.

INSIDE

BUD FINALLY FINDS A HOME



PAGE 11

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MARK ANDREWS	6
LETTERS	7
COMPETITION	9
MEMORY LANE	12
THE FAST TICKET	17
PROPERTY	25
MOTORING	32
SPORT	35 & 36
CONTACT US	

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Driver is remanded after fatal crash



Georgia Ann Evans, aged 18

A 24-year-old man has appeared in court following a crash that killed a teenage girl in Dudley.

Georgia Ann Evans, 18, from Himley, died after a collision between her Ford Fiesta and an Audi on Priory Road, Dudley, on Thursday, at around 10.35pm.

A passenger also suffered non-life threatening injuries.

The Audi driver is alleged to have abandoned the car at the scene.

Kuba Oles, of Beaconvieu Road, West Bromwich, is charged with caus-

ing death by dangerous driving, failing to stop and failing to report in relation to the accident on October 27. He was remanded in custody until his next appearance at Wolverhampton Crown Court on November 28.

Oles is also accused of driving dangerously in a separate incident on the Birmingham New Road on October 1.

Miss Evans was described as 'kind-hearted and spirited' by her devastated parents.

Police have said they remain keen to speak to anyone who witnessed

the crash, which happened near the junction with Cedar Road at around 10.30pm.

Sergeant Alan Wood, from the West Midlands Police Collision Investigation Unit, said: "We are still appealing for witnesses to come forward. We would like to speak to the driver of a light-coloured van that was travelling along Priory Road shortly after the collision and turned left into Cedar Road."

Miss Evans' parents said: "Our beautiful, kind-hearted and spirited daughter has been taken away from us."

'Minnie Mouse' gloves robber has his jail term reduced

A ROBBER who was caught out by the 'Minnie Mouse' gloves he wore when raiding a Black Country shop has had his jail term slashed by 18 months.

Shane Trevor Hadlington, 27, of no fixed abode, was jailed for six years at Wolverhampton Crown Court on April 8 after he and another man raided the One Stop store in Bourne Street, Coseley, on August 15 last year.

Mr Justice Hickinbottom told London's Appeal Court that it had been raided no less than three times in the previous 18 months.

The second man, who has not been caught, grabbed an assistant and marched her to a backroom store. He picked up a metal bar and made a second member of staff unlock a cabinet and fill a duvet cover with cigarettes and spirits. Hadlington filled a bag with cigarettes and alcohol from the shelves. He 'did not know precisely' what was happening in the back. The pair left after three minutes with £3,700 worth of swag.

Hadlington was identified by a 'Dad' tattoo on his arm and the 'Minnie Mouse' gloves he wore, later found at his home. He denied taking part the jury but a jury convicted him of robbery.

He had 16 previous convictions involving 64 crimes, including stealing cars, a robbery and burglary.

Lawyers argued his jail term was too tough considering his lesser role.

Mr Justice Hickinbottom said the 'sentence imposed was too high and manifestly so', reducing the jail term to four-and-a-half years.

Charity's vital van is wrecked

A CHARITY which had its van stolen during a raid on a community centre in Dudley has said the loss of the vehicle has had a 'massive' impact.

But bosses at Lunch on the Run say they will not be beaten after the break-in at the DY1 Centre in Stafford Street, which also saw around £600 in cash stolen, including £200 raised for cancer charity Macmillan.

Last Wednesday thieves struck at the centre, which serves as a base for several charities. Police have launched an investigation into the raid and theft of the white Ford Transit van, later found as a burned out wreck.

Lunch on the Run, which trains people with learning disabilities, bought the van after a fundraising campaign. It is now having to use a car for deliveries.

Free plays about Victorian miners

VICTORIAN characters will be brought back to life in free performances at Dudley Archives on Tipton Road next week.

Murchison and the Miners is a free half hour play on Tuesday and Thursday (November 10) at 6.30pm and Saturday (November 12) at 1pm.

Burgled shopkeeper is forced to close business

A THRIVING town centre business is closing after just 18 months – after being burgled for the second time.

Bosses at Hyper Hyper Clothing in Stourbridge say they are unable to continue after suffering losses of around £5,000 in stolen stock and criminal damage during the latest raid, which took place in October.

Craig Smith, who runs the store with his wife Jennifer, described it as 'soul destroying' and warned that other traders in Stourbridge were suffering after burglaries.

Describing the latest incident, Mr Smith said: "It was on a Sunday and I'd closed at 2pm as normal. I came home and then realised I'd left my laptop in the shop. So I went back and I think I must have disturbed them. There was damage everywhere."

Mr Smith said this was the second time they had been victims of a break-in and this time the cost – as well as the fear of it happening again – was too much for them to continue trading.

"It is soul destroying. We only opened 18 months ago and we invested a lot of time and money into the business," said Mr Smith. "We were doing OK and have some loyal customers, but these are costs you can't account for."

Insurance

"Even with insurance you have to pay the excess," added Mr Smith. "There have been a lot of break-ins, right in the centre of Stourbridge, along Market Street and the High Street. Others have had it happen twice too. It's really bad at the moment."

"We've spoken to police about it but I know they don't have enough resources. If something big happens in Dudley they are sent over there," he claimed.

Mr Smith added that a private security firm had offered to patrol the area if each business contributed a sum towards the cost but not everyone wanted to sign up.

"It's a shame because that would have made a difference. I know a lot of the independent businesses liked the idea."

A man has been charged with burglary and was due to appear at Dudley Magistrates Court this week.

Superstars snap up Elizabeth's jackets



Some of the jackets that have been decorated by Elizabeth Isley, which are being snapped up by celebrities

A LEATHER jacket from the Salvation Army helped launch a Sedgley artist's career – and she now boasts celebrities including Kim Kardashian and Kanye West among her customers.

Elizabeth Isley, aged 21, has had A-list stars request her specially-painted leather jackets priced at £500 along with her very own clothing collection in London's prestigious Liberty store on Regent Street.

Kanye West and Kim Kardashian

are among the many celebrities that are requesting jackets and she is currently working on one for singer Florence Welch of Florence and the Machine.

It all started when she decorated a leather jacket bought from the Salvation Army in Dudley and then posted a picture of her handiwork online.

Elizabeth said: "Seeing my friends in my clothes is my favourite thing – I did a jacket for my best friend Hannah with her fa-

vourite lyrics on and it was so nice to see her in it."

With a total of 24,000 Instagram followers including popstar Rihanna, things seem to be just getting started for Elizabeth, who studied at Halesowen College before going to Birmingham City University to study fine art.

Shortly before graduating, she received the call from Liberty London asking her if they could stock her jackets in her own collection – the 24 jackets sold out in six days.

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Devastating fire wrecks furniture business

A FAMILY-run furniture firm which was devastated by a massive fire has been forced to shut down.

Flames reached 40ft as Sprite Leisure, in Tividale, was engulfed by the fire in July. Around 75 per cent of the building was destroyed.

Last week a spokesman for the firm confirmed it had been forced to close due to the fire and said 'things were up in the air'.

A message on its website says the company has ceased trading.

It reads: "Sprite Leisure have ceased trading. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our customers for their custom and support."

Distraught

At the time of the blaze, emergency services said concrete asbestos had been involved in the fire. Eyewitnesses described the scene as 'horrendous' as crews remained on site for most of the day.

Speaking at the time of the incident, Watch Commander Steve Lees, from Dudley Fire Station, said: "The fire was already through the roof on arrival. Crews started removing products to ensure that didn't become involved in the fire as well.

"There was cement asbestos involved. We had put our safety measures in place to ensure both our firefighters and members of the public were not unduly put in harm's way.

"The owner of the businesses were in attendance. They are quite distraught."

MP welcomes funding U-turn

DUDLEY North MP Ian Austin has welcomed a Government U-turn on plans to cut apprenticeship funding.

The Government had announced funding cuts for 16 to 18-year-old apprentices by around 30 per cent, rising to over 50 per cent or more for apprentices living in the most deprived areas of the country. It has now dropped these plans and promised to boost funding instead.

Mr Austin conducted a survey of thousands of residents and found that more than nine in 10 opposed cuts to apprenticeship funding.

He said: "We need to make education and skills Dudley's top priority to help local businesses grow, give young people a good start and help older people get new jobs too."

Civic awards event for 40 children

INSPIRATIONAL young people in Dudley were honoured with awards. Mayor of Dudley Councillor Mohammed Hanif attended the inaugural children in care awards. More than 40 children were nominated.

Party firm boss barred from working with children



Jonathan Sword – images

A MAN who ran a model racing car circuit taken to parties for youngsters had amassed a collection of indecent images of children from the internet.

Jonathan Sword, who also had images involving torture and bestiality, was caught after the police were called to the funeral parlour where he also worked.

His bosses had been suspicious about his behaviour in the mortuary – although he faced no charges in relation to that when he appeared at Warwick Crown Court.

Sword, 54, of Southwick Road, Halesowen, pleaded guilty to six charges of

making indecent images of children and two of possessing extreme pornography.

He was sentenced to 16 months in prison suspended for two years and was ordered to take part in a rehabilitation activity for 50 days and to carry out 100 hours of unpaid work.

Sword, who owned the Phoenix Scalextric Circuit in Jill Lane, Studley, will be barred from working with children and must register as a sex offender for ten years.

Prosecutor Martin Butterworth said Sword came to the attention of the police in May while he was working for a funeral

parlour – which he did not name – in south Warwickshire.

He said he also owned and ran a Scalextric circuit which gave children's parties.

When the police spoke to Sword, they seized his computer and phone. Indecent images were found.

When Sword, who had no previous convictions, was interviewed he admitted downloading the images and building up a collection of them over five years.

Mark Sharman, defending, said Sword, may have post traumatic stress disorder and had served in the Royal Armoured Corps.

Drug user's threat to kill his mother and siblings

A MAN under the influence of drugs had a look of 'pure evil' in his eyes as he threatened to kill his mother and siblings.

The incident happened after Adam Willetts fell into a spiral of depression and drug-taking which led to his wife and children leaving home.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that Willetts, 31, of Cotswold Close in Rowley Regis, had been holding a blade at his side when he threatened to slit the throats of his mother, half-brother and half-sister.

Willetts' moment of madness came after he had lost his job and his life spiralled out of control due to substance abuse.

His mother initially said she was 'petrified' he would kill her on September 29 this year.

He was also found in possession of cocaine and cannabis.

The court heard how Willetts' wife found him overdosed on a drug and decided that was the final straw for their relationship.

Cut

Prosecutor Kevin Jones said: "His drug taking got out of hand. When he saw his mother, half-brother and half-sister he said that he would slit their throats.

"He doesn't recall saying it and told police he just wanted to harm himself. He cut his own left wrist and needed to go to hospital for treatment.

"All of the witnesses made further statements in which they said that he didn't hold the knife close to them. The drugs were also found on him when he was arrested."

Willetts pleaded guilty to affray and possession of class A and B drugs.

Defence barrister Richard Franck said: "His nan died a year ago and it had a massive impact on him. He hadn't had any dealings with drugs before then. But he slipped into a deep depression and felt like he wanted to kill himself.

"His wife is trying to set up appointments for him with psychiatrists. His wife wants him back. The main reason she left him was his drug use. He wants to get back in control of his life."

The court heard that in her first statement his mother said that 'the look in his eye was pure evil' and she was 'petrified he was going to kill her with the knife'.

Judge James Burbidge deferred sentence until November 24 for reports.



Tom Winters – the 22-year-old father of two died on Sunday at Manor Way

Rider killed in crash is named

A MOTORCYCLIST who died when his bike crashed into a tree in Halesowen has been named as father-of-two Tom Winters.

The 22-year-old, described as an 'adored father' by his family, died after crashing on the A456 Manor Way on Sunday.

"As a family we are all devastated by the sudden and tragic loss of Tom," a statement released by the family said.

"He was an adored father, son, husband, brother and friend and touched the lives of many with his kindness, compassion and beautiful humour.

"He leaves two sons aged three years and just one month in age. For this reason, we ask that the family's privacy is respected at this difficult time."

Two ambulances and the Midlands Air Ambulance were called to the scene near the Hagley Road junction at around 9.30am.

It came less than 24 hours after a motorcyclist was seriously injured in an accident on Birmingham Road, Rowley Regis. He was taken to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hospital in appeal for more helpers

AN open day to recruit extra volunteers to lend a hand at a Black Country hospital trust will take place on Tuesday, November 11.

The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust is looking to bolster its team of voluntary helpers. The event, hosted by chief operating officer Paul Bytheway, starts at 10am in the Lecture Theatre at Russells Hall Hospital. It will give guests the opportunity to speak to some of the existing team of 400 volunteers. To attend call (01384) 456111 extension 1064 or email communications@dgh.nhs.uk

Comedy night is close to a sell-out

SOLD out signs could go up on a gig in Brierley Hill by comics Joe Lycett and Mark Watson.

Ahead of this week's early bird deadline, nearly 600 tickets had already been sold for the February 18 date at the civic hall.

Lycett and Watson will be supported by Black Country comic Jonny Cole, from Wednesbury.

It is the second installment of Live At The Civic, the idea of Dudley promoter and resident compere, Wayne Beese. Tickets are available online at www.bhillcivic.co.uk

Damage caused in football club raid

VANDALS broke into Stourbridge FC's ground for the fourth time in the space of a year.

Windows and doors were damaged in the raid at the War Memorial Ground in the early hours of October 25. Only a single bottle of whisky was taken.

Police were called just after midnight after being alerted by the club's alarms. Officers are now examining CCTV footage which shows two men forcing entry.

Survey carried out on park's dog-free zone

COUNCIL bosses are examining feedback following a controversial six-month scheme banning dogs from sections of Himley Park.

The six-month trial came into force in February and continued as a trial.

A survey to get park users' views was carried out. Councillor Khurshid Ahmed confirmed they would now 'assess the results' on whether to make the scheme permanent.

The zone covered the park's main entrance down to the West Gate.

Takeaway bid lodged

A FORMER tanning studio could turned into a takeaway. The change of use was submitted to Dudley Council planners for 209 Priory Road. Planning documents state the applicant has operated a takeaway in Tipton for the past 20 years and is 'confident that the business will be successful'.



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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



OUT with the lawnmower for what ought to be the last cut of the year. But nothing is guaranteed any more. As the seasons change, you are quite likely to winter-grease your mower and stow it at the back of the shed this week, only to wake up next week to a balmy zephyr from north Africa and the sight of your grass growing again.

WHAT a wonderfully precise language English is. I once spent some time trying to explain to a German friend the difference between washing and washing-up. He could not quite grasp how the involvement of crockery, cutlery and Fairy Liquid was all implied by the one little word "up."

YES, I admit it. We've been out panic-buying Marmite. Ever since the Brexit-inspired price-rise spat a few weeks ago, we have lived in dread of running out of the stuff. I have therefore raided Waitrose and amassed enough Marmite to last us two years. One pot.



TALKING of offence, for the past 100 years the French have suffered the national humiliation of seeing their beautiful language being kicked into obscurity by the global spread of gashly, guttural English. No wonder that as the UK prepares to quit the EU, some French politicians are demanding that debates be held in French. Forget it, mes amis.

French may be beautiful but it is a tricky language. They use the same verb for "like" as for "love," and when they "demand" something they may be merely requesting. If you inadvertently use the verb for kiss, you are actually proposing full sex, while someone requesting a kiss on the cheek will ask for "un smack," and you can see where that might lead. English may never sound as lovely as French but at least we never confuse a smacker with a good smacking.

I BUMPED into a crowd of moorhen in the park and wondered what was the collective noun. It is a plump of moorhen. And a scoop of journalists, since you ask.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

Family disgusted at death driver's sentence

A DRIVER who caused his friend's death after crashing his sports car through a wall has been jailed for 14 months.

A court heard how 31-year-old Jamie Wharton raced down St Peter's Road in Netherton before skidding into a garden, killing 23-year-old passenger Timothy Pearson.

Mr Pearson's family and friends walked out of Wolverhampton Crown Court in disgust after Judge John Wait told Wharton his sentence.

Wharton was driving a Nissan Skyline with Mr Pearson as a passenger on the evening of June 3, 2014, when it left the road. The exact speed could not be calculated but eyewitnesses said it was well in excess of the 30mph limit.

Wharton, of Birch Coppice, Quarry Bank, had earlier been due to stand trial on a charge of causing death by dangerous driving.

Lesser

After the Crown Prosecution Service agreed to accept the lesser charge of causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving, Wharton pleaded guilty and was sentenced on Friday.

His Nissan had skidded sideways off the road in what was described as a 'crab-like' movement in court.

Mr Pearson, from Quarry Bank, was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident. Wharton was injured but has made a full recovery.

The judge told Wharton: "Timothy Pearson was a devoted grandson whose death has devastated a whole family to the extent that some are on medication and some are receiving counselling."

The judge added that he was satisfied from police evidence that Wharton had been drinking alcohol either on the day of the crash or had consumed 'far, far more' than he had admitted to officers.

He said Mr Pearson's death had been caused by a 'combination of deficiencies' in Wharton's driving, which included his inexperience in driving his Nissan Skyline sports car, which he had owned for 10 years but took out rarely.

Defending Wharton, Mr Andrew Jackson said his client was sorry for his actions on that night and said he was 'emphatically not' a boy racer.

Wharton was will be banned from driving for four years and seven months.

Care assistant goes for gold



Hospital worker Izzy Sandford, 23, earned the gold award

A HEALTHCARE assistant from Stourbridge is celebrating success after achieving the Duke of Edinburgh's gold award.

Izzy Sandford, aged 23, who works at West Midlands Hospital in Halesowen, scooped the prestigious accolade after her dedication which included cross-country treks and voluntary work.

Izzy says the scheme, for young people in the UK, has given her new skills and confidence.

"I feel really proud to have achieved the Gold award," she said.

"The Duke of Edinburgh's award is something I'm very passionate about and it's great to have achieved all three awards. I feel that the whole programme has made a big difference to me and has helped me get to where I am today with Ramsay Health Care at West Midlands Hospital.

"The scheme has given me new skills, the ability to face challenges head on and confidence which I can apply to the workplace.

"The final part of the Gold award was a trip to Cornwall where a group of us took part in a 'surf and turf' residential."

Petition is opposed to lollipop patrol cut

A PETITION has been launched to stop the axe falling on crossing wardens from outside Dudley borough schools.

The council has said it can no longer afford to provide crossing patrols and that schools must pay if they want them to stay.

Parents have urged bosses to think again. A petition has been launched to put pressure on the council to scrap the plans and has already been signed by around 400 people.

There are fears wardens will go as schools will be unable to afford them.

Under the plans, patrols will be axed from April, saving the authority around £260,000 a year.

Cat Ketley, from Halesowen, who launched the petition, said: "Schools feel there is a great need for crossing patrols to be kept to maintain the safety of children and families, but they themselves have budget constraints. When the Government is trying to promote healthy lifestyles, surely it is a false economy to axe crossing patrols which encourage families to walk to school."

Parent Charlene Williamson, from Halesowen, said: "Without a crossing patrol there will be accidents."

Councillor Hilary Bills said the safety of children was 'paramount' but that the authority was experiencing 'unprecedented financial challenges'.

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Fire wrecks furniture business

A FAMILY-run furniture firm which was devastated by a massive fire has been forced to shut down.

Flames reached 40ft as Sprite Leisure, in Tividale, was engulfed by the fire in July. Around 75 per cent of the building was destroyed.

Last week a spokesman for the firm confirmed it had been forced to close due to the fire and said 'things were up in the air'.

A message on its website says the company has ceased trading.

It reads: "Sprite Leisure have ceased trading. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our customers for their custom and support."

At the time of the blaze, emergency services said concrete asbestos had been involved in the fire.

Eyewitnesses described the scene as 'horrendous' as crews remained on site for most of the day.

Speaking at the time of the incident, Watch Commander Steve Lees, from Dudley Fire Station, said: "The fire was already through the roof on arrival. Crews started removing products to ensure that didn't become involved in the fire as well."

"There was cement asbestos involved. We had put our safety measures in place to ensure both our firefighters and members of the public were not unduly put in harm's way."

Popular brass band has two concert dates

LANGLEY Band will be performing two concerts later this month at the same Black Country venue.

The brass band will entertain at the Barlow Theatre, in Langley, on November 25 at 8pm and on November 26 at 7.30pm.

Tickets will be £8 or £5 for under-16s. Call (01384) 918547.

Lack of equipment was a factor in sister's death – claim

Lights switch-on has The X Factor



Hundreds turned out for the Christmas lights switch-on at Merry Hill by Reggie 'n' Bollic along with Free Radio's Jo Russell as part of a programme of activities that started at noon.

Bollic said: "It was amazing. The crowd's reaction was amazing. The whole energy was amazing."

Talent

X Factor's Freddy Parker and Christian Burrows also performed alongside Britain's Got Talent finalists Jack Pack.

Christian said: "I loved performing here. When the crowd sing my lyrics I feel blessed."

Reggie 'n' Bollic released their first single New Girl in May 2016, which charted 26 in the UK Top 40.

Kirsty Hadlington, aged 31 from Bilston, who was attending the event with her family, said: "Our favourites were Reggie 'n' Bollic. It was an amazing event."

A STOURBRIDGE man who claims his sister was denied vital health support for a genetic condition before she died has hit out at West Midlands NHS providers.

Bryan Gould, aged 56, says he watched the condition of his sister, Christine, who suffered with oculopharyngeal muscular dystrophy, worsen before she died in 2014.

He says NHS providers' lack of support in giving her life-saving equipment was a factor. He is meeting in Parliament with NHS bosses and MPs, including Stourbridge representative Margot James.

The equipment in question was a machine that helps people with muscle-wasting conditions to cough. Brian, who also has OPMD, said: "My sister really needed support from a cough assist machine, but never received it. Her quality of life would have been so much better in her final years."

Shocking

"This potentially life-saving device is vital for people with weak respiratory muscles. There are no treatments or cures for muscle-wasting conditions, so to deny people in this way is just shocking."

The equipment simulates a cough for those whose chests are too weak to naturally clear their lungs. If left untreated, it could cause chest infections and even premature death.

There is now a local cough assist commissioning policy through NHS Dudley CCG. But Brian said: "It is disgraceful other CCGs in the West Midlands and nationally are stalling on such crucial equipment."

Muscular Dystrophy UK says West Midlands NHS leaders have refused to adopt a funding policy for cough assist machines, despite them being available elsewhere.

Artists lose traditional show venue

AN art group, formed in Dudley nearly 90 years ago, will be without a permanent venue for its annual show following the closure of Dudley Museum and Art Gallery in the town centre.

The Dudley Society of Artists, formed 1928, will be holding their last exhibition at the venue from November 26 to December 22 at the building in St James's Road.

Dudley Council is to consider the future of the site. There are plans to move exhibits to Dudley Archives and History Centre on Tipton Road.

Terry Glazebrook, chairman of Dudley Society of Artists, said: "This has left us in a difficult position and we are now having to look at the possibility of doing similar pop-up shows throughout the year instead. It is incredibly sad."

A petition signed by more than 4,000 people wanted to the museum and gallery maintained.

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IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews



High-speed rail plans are on the wrong track

PUTTING the case for high-speed rail this week, HS2 chairman Sir David Higgins made a very telling comment.

"Birmingham and the wider West Midlands region are already enjoying the benefits of HS2," he said.

Aside from the questionable assertion that we are already feeling the benefit of high-speed rail, it was the phrase "Birmingham and the wider West Midlands" which jarred the most. The clear implication being that the other towns of what is loosely termed the West Midlands are satellites of Birmingham, a sort of commuter belt around the great metropolis.

For the record, Birmingham has a population of about 1.1 million, "the wider West Midlands region" has a population of five million. Which presumably means, when our West Midlands Combined Authority gets going, that Birmingham will receive just 20 per cent of any investment in public infrastructure. Yeah, right.

Now I can see how Birmingham will benefit from a fast rail-link to London, and good luck to it. The proposed transport hub at Stafford will also be good news for the town's economy, even if that is scant consolation to those whose homes and businesses will be obliterated by the line.

But while upwards of £55 billion is being thrown at a scheme to benefit a handful of already wealthy large cities, there does not appear to be even a few million to throw at what passes for a rail service in the Black Country.

While Birmingham receives its fourth city centre railway station, the rail network for the Black Country remains a joke. There are a few small commuter stations at places such as Tipton, Old Hill or Cradley Heath, and the odd direct service to London from "Sandwell & Dudley", on the outskirts of Oldbury. West Bromwich and Dudley remain splendidly isolated. No-one can spare a few million to reopen the Walsall-Wednesbury-Dudley railway line, which would bring far more benefits to the Black Country than HS2.

The great and good in the Big Smoke may have learned to stop referring to the West Midlands as "Greater Birmingham", but their thinking is very Brum-centric.

The truth is that for a long time Birmingham has had far more in common with London than it does with the Black Country. How much more will that division grow when it is takes 52 minutes to travel by public transport from Birmingham to London, but 1 hour 26 minutes to get from Birmingham to Kingswinford?

□ □ □

THE blazers at Lancaster Gate are going cap in hand to Fifa for permission to display poppies on their shirts when England play Scotland on Armistice Day. Football's world governing body bans football shirts from displaying political, religious or commercial messages. It is hard to see how honouring servicemen is political, religious or commercial.



Geoff McMillan – puzzled by missing name



New Zealand Defence Adviser Evan Williams with David Braithwaite at the ceremony



Jack Braithwaite – 'simple peacemaking'

Shot at Dawn soldiers are now on memorial

Killed for mutiny, their stories were lost to history before one man's selfless quest to reveal them. **CLARE BUTLER** reports

SOLDIERS shot dead for refusing to obey their own commanding officers have been commemorated 100 years on.

Jack Braithwaite of the New Zealand Otago Regiment, and William Lewis from Scotland were executed on October 29, 1916 while Jesse Robert Short, of Newcastle upon Tyne, was killed a year later.

Their names are inscribed on individual plaques attached to individual wooden stakes as part of the Shot at Dawn memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum.

The three mutineers join 306 other men remembered in the memorial for alleged desertion or cowardice during the Great War.

Relatives and representatives of each of the men attended the special ceremony on Saturday from as far as New Zealand.

Jack Braithwaite's nephew, David Braithwaite, from New Zealand, aged 79, was one of them. He said: "My uncle was executed exactly 100 years ago today. It gives closure for our family. We have had some challenges over the past 20 years in trying to get recognised what we thought was wrong."

"My father was the youngest of a family of 24 children. He never told me or our family anything about Jack's demise and those were the days when mutiny was a scandal. I found out in the mid-1980s and slowly with the help of a lot of historians we thought that we should explore the pardons which we achieved in 2000 in New Zealand and 2006 in Britain. The whole ceremony was very appropriate."

Jack Braithwaite had lost his stripe in May 1916 for being absent without leave.

But this was followed by three courts-martials in June and July 1916 for acts such as stating a falsehood to an officer, being absent without leave and two charges of escaping confinement and escaping while being escorted to



Families of the soldiers who were shot attend the service to commemorate their lives

a field punishment compound. Prison sentences with hard labour followed.

On August 28, 1916, an Australian soldier known as Private Little complained the hot water had run out in the showers at Bialgies. As the matter escalated, Little yelled for his meal. Braithwaite, on mess orderly duties, took Little to his tent and gave him a meal.

His mistake was to take Little from the custody of a Staff Sergeant Shearing. Braithwaite was charged with mutiny along with others.

In his letter to the General Field Court-Martial, Jack would comment how in Egypt similar actions had been punished with seven or 14 days in prison or seven days' loss of pay and that he did not understand "that a simple act of peacemaking could be brought to look like deliberate mutiny". He was shot at 6.05am on October 29, 1916 – five minutes after Gunner Lewis, whose story remains more of a mystery.

Jesse Robert Short, from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, was executed in 1917. On September

11 of that year, Corporal Short was at the base camp at Etaples, France, where – having recovered either from wounds or illness – he was undergoing re-training before being returned to the frontline.

Disturbances broke out in the camp that day, and one group of 80 soldiers carrying placards and armed with sticks marched on a bridge across the river Canache.

Cpl Short tried to persuade the soldiers to lay down their arms, and referring to its commander, said: "Don't listen to that officer, that b***** ought to have a rope tied round his neck with a stone on it and be chucked into the river."

Cpl Short was court-martialled the next day, found guilty of inciting mutiny and sentenced to death. He was executed weeks later. All three soldiers were subsequently pardoned.

Among the guests who attended the service were relatives of the soldiers – Bryan Ritchie and his wife, Marilyn, from Edinburgh on

William Lewis's behalf; Jack Braithwaite's nephew, David Braithwaite, from New Zealand, and his wife, Rae; and Jesse Robert Short's grandson, Neil Graham, among others along with other family members.

Mr Ritchie, from near Edinburgh, said: "I was there to represent my great-uncle who was shot at dawn 100 years ago today. I don't even know if my mum knows that her uncle existed. To think 100 years ago today my great-uncle stood in front of a firing squad and was shot at the age of 30. I've got mixed emotions. It's someone I didn't know but I'm here to represent my family. I thought the ceremony was very poignant."

During the 1914-18 war, 346 British and Commonwealth soldiers were executed – a higher figure than those recorded by both the French and Germans. The memorial's plaques are arranged in the form of a Greek theatre around the statue of Private Herbert Burden, of the 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers, who was shot at Ypres in 1915.

Visited

The non-inclusion of mutineers' names and the absence in particular of Jack Braithwaite's name was highlighted by Western Front Association New Zealand member Geoff McMillan following a visit to the Arboretum in 2015.

Mr McMillan explained how he was puzzled to find Jack Braithwaite's name missing upon his visit last year and so set out on pursuit of its inclusion. He said: "When I visited the Arboretum, I was moved to see how the names of hundreds of soldiers executed for desertion or cowardice in the First World War were recorded in the Shot at Dawn memorial, but puzzled that the name of fellow Kiwi Jack Braithwaite was missing."

When he did some research, he discovered the other two missing names.

Richard Purchasehouse and Lee Dent, of the Chase Project – a military history research group – assisted with the research and got in touch with the Shot at Dawn memorial artist, Andy DeComyn, who was keen to help.

The memorial was created by Mr DeComyn in 2000 as a gift to the relatives, and unveiled by Gertrude Harris, daughter of Private Harry Farr, in June 2001.

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Enjoyable day in Black Country capital

FIREd by a disappointing visit to Walsall, I decided to head for the capital of the Black Country, Dudley. I travelled in the luxury of a new 126 bus I'd recommend it to anyone, especially those who enjoy free travel.

Dudley at a distance, as you travel along the Birmingham New Road, has the advantage of looking extremely attractive with its ancient castle clearly visible above the surrounding trees and as you draw closer, along Priory Road, the well kept surroundings of the ruined Priory spring into view. Dudley bus station, which replaced the old one in the 80s, is altogether very much a horse of a different colour.

Dudley town centre, apparently, had been hit hard by the opening of Merry Hill Centre. Personally, I think this did Dudley town an unintentional good turn in the long term.

Dudley High Street today has many of the familiar British high street names but retains many local businesses such as the colloquially named 'sucke shop' which sells sweets opposite the Arcade Cafe in the delightful Fountain Arcade where I enjoyed a cup of reasonably priced coffee followed by

a visit to the cafe's loo which I found to be one of the cleanest I've ever been in.

I sat in the afternoon sun for a short while on a bench which I shared with a life-size statue in bronze of long dead Dudley poet Ben Boucher.

As my bus home made its way slowly down Castle Street I gazed up at the Castle standing there diligently over the centuries with its flag of St George fluttering above, I thought to myself how well it summed up this Black Country town.

JOHN DAVENPORT
Wednesfield

Alleviate need for food banks

IN the 70s when most working people's basic food bill was around £5 my husband was out of work for 12 months at a time, twice. After the bills were paid out of his dole money I was left with around £1.50 to buy food for a family of four.

My father never had a particularly well paid job so my mother had to manage and she taught me how to cook meals from cheaper cuts of meat. We also had cooking lessons at school.

My family never went without a good meal and always had breakfast. We could not have biscuits, sweets, crisps or holidays but you cut your cloth accordingly. There were no food banks and benefits were unavailable to anyone buying their own home.

It was hard but we got through it. I feel if many people were taught how to manage their money better and how to cook on a budget there would be a less of a need for food banks now.

JENNY JAMES
Wordsley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

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Chronicle Editorial,
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Letters should be brief and **MUST** include name, address and telephone number number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Can anyone explain flaw in this logic?

WILL someone please point out the flaw in my logic?

Scenario: UK as I hope, refuses the free movement of people and is therefore kicked out of the EU single market.

Result: EU puts up tariff barriers to Brit goods; UK puts up tariff barriers to EU goods. However, with the pound being devalued, shortly, prices of EU goods into UK will rise and prices of Brit exports to the EU will fall.

Net effect: EU sales to UK hit by a double whammy of a higher price due to the declining pound plus a further price hike due to the UK import tariff increase. This results in a substantial adverse effect on the sale of EU products in the UK. This would be particularly severe on expensive luxury goods from the most influential EU countries.

UK sales to EU would cost more by reason of imposition of an EU tariff but due to the weakness of the pound this would be negated to a greater or lesser degree.

Why am I not hearing from politicians and economists that EU exports to UK would price wise increase by a much greater degree than prices of Brit goods to EU thereby giving UK a commercial advantage and why am I hearing nothing of this bargaining chip from the Remoaners?

ALAN M ETHERIDGE
Dudley

Reassuring the public

SUPERINTENDENT Holby has tried to reassure Dudley residents after a spate of stabbings saying: "Policing is changing with a new model focusing more on what we can do to stop things like this in the first place."

Here in Kingswinford our neighbourhood police team is to move to Brierley Hill, giving a larger area to police with the same resources.

A M BARRETT
Kingswinford

Can child be defined?

WHEN the government announced they were going to let in 300 children from the camp in Calais, I thought these (children) were aged from very young to perhaps seven or 12-years-old.

The government need to define a child. The pictures we see show children appearing to be in their late teens, some look in their 20s. Some have moustaches.

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FIVE MINUTES FROM MERRY HILL

Coroner in call for ban on slim aid drug after fatality

"SHE was a beautiful, bright and brilliant daughter." The words of heartbroken father Nazir Shahid following the tragic death of his 20-year-old daughter Imama Shahid.

Imama, aged 20, from Halesowen, died after taking unlicensed weight-loss tablets, an inquest heard. Senior Coroner for the Black Country, Zafar Siddique, said he would now write to the Home Office in a bid to get the dangerous drug – called dinitrophenol – banned.

Inquest on rider's death is suspended

AN inquest has opened into a 20-year-old man who died after a motorbike crash.

Elriot Beddow, from Bridgnorth Road, Stourton, died after a crash on Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill, in the early hours of September 3.

The apprentice engineer was riding his Harley Davidson when, at around 2.10am, he collided with railings and a wall as he came around a right-hand bend on the crest of a hill.

Black Country Coroners Court heard how he sustained multiple injuries and, despite the efforts of emergency services, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Sergeant Chris Ridge, from West Midlands Police Collision Investigation Unit, said: "CCTV has now been analysed and all witnesses spoken to. We are awaiting the scene reconstruction report and any possible charges."

Senior Coroner Zafar Siddique suspended the inquest pending the ongoing criminal investigations.

Imama had recently taken her college exams and passed with 'excellent grades', and had been accepted to Leicester University to study a Medical Science degree.

The court heard Imama was taken to Russells Hall Hospital feeling unwell after a rise in her temperature.

She had been on medication for kidney problems since aged six and had been diagnosed with lupus in 2007.

Mr Shahid, aged 46, a self-employed cab driver, said: "We noticed that she was feeling warm. My eldest daughter called an ambulance as her heart rate increased too."

"She told ambulance staff that she had taken some weight loss tablets. When I got to the hospital she was okay and the nurses said that her temperature was going back to normal, so not to worry. But then her condition deteriorated again."

Mr Shahid added: "Imama was incredibly loving and caring."

Mr Shahid said Imama was worried about her weight from the side effects of her medication.

On June 18 she suffered a cardiac arrest and could not be resuscitated.

In a medical report it revealed that Imama had taken six dinitrophenol tablets over 48 hours. The cause of death given was dinitrophenol fatality.

Mr Siddique gave a conclusion of accidental death due to taking the drug. He said: "This is an unlicensed slimming aid that is incredibly dangerous."

Historic church set for demolition



St Luke's Church in Cradley Heath is to be knocked down to create a green space

WORK to tear down an historic church that has stood in the Black Country for 170 years has begun.

Workmen have begun the process of demolishing St Luke's Church in Cradley Heath. The High Street building is being razed for safety reasons.

Crucial repairs to enable the building to stay standing would have cost £750,000, which couldn't be raised.

The church closed in October 2014 due to its declining condition. A new home has been found for the congregation at St John's Church, Dudley Wood.

Despite the demolition of St Luke's, the footprint of the building will remain and be turfed over to provide a community space where people can sit next to the graveyard.

Archdeacon of Dudley Nikki Groarke said: "While it is always sad when a building has to be demolished for safety reasons, we know that in reality the church is the people, not the bricks and mortar."

"The congregation of St Luke's has joined with that of St John's, and together they are having a great impact on the local community."

Vicar of Dudley Wood and Cradley Heath, Alicia Baker, said: "People have obviously felt very sad to lose St Luke's but have been very understanding when the reasons have been explained."

"Lots of people walk through the graveyard on their way to and from the town centre, so having the green space will make it a pleasant area for all."

Police officer honoured for resuscitation

A BLACK Country police constable has been honoured after his actions gave a gravely ill woman extra time with her family.

In February an elderly woman from Dudley activated her telecare button stating she was on the floor and not able to get up. Two telecare officers went to her house and could see her sitting on the floor and waving at them in distress but were unable to get access to the property.

Police help was asked for and Pc Steven Dunn was sent to the home. He found the telecare workers already inside, as they had managed to get a spare set of keys from a neighbour.

The woman appeared lifeless. Pc Dunn began performing CPR until paramedics arrived and together they tried to resuscitate the woman. They managed to regain a pulse before she was taken to hospital.

It was later confirmed that had Pc Dunn not attempted CPR the lack of oxygen flow could have resorted in brain damage. Sadly the woman passed away a few days later.

Pc Dunn was presented with a Royal Humane Society resuscitation certificate.

Hospice is to benefit from nicest initiative

MARY Stevens Hospice is to benefit from a nationwide scheme that aims to highlight the work of charities across the UK.

The Stourbridge hospice will be supported by the latest The Nicest Job in Britain recruit.

The not-for-profit initiative helps charities gain exposure using a national philanthropy manager, who travels the country, working for a week at a time with for 40 charities in the UK, to promote their work for free. A hospice spokesman said: "This year, we're very proud to say that we've been chosen out of thousands of entrants, as one of just 40 UK charities to be part of the scheme."

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Stunt rider extraordinaire and Team Green Ambassador, Lee Bowers, will be back at the show and performing throughout the week in his very own stunt arena. Freestyle Motocross makes a popular return as the godfathers of craziness ramp-up for what's set to be the biggest, loudest and most insane show to ever hit one of Europe's most successful Motorcycle shows.

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BSB, WSB, Moto GP, Speedway, and TT disciplines. Riders will be on hand for signing sessions and photo opportunities. To book, call 0844 581 2345 or visit www.motorcyclevive.co.uk.

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To stand a chance of winning a pair of tickets simply answer the question below. Who sponsors the main stage?

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- c) Black Horse

Send entry on a postcard with your name, address and contact number to Motorcycle Live competition, Chronicle editorial, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES. Closing date: November 10.

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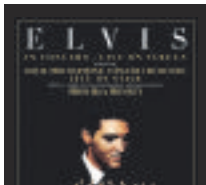


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Concern as figures for assaults on police rise

ALMOST 600 West Midlands Police officers have been assaulted on duty in the first nine months of this year, according to figures from the Police Federation.

The alarming figures have prompted West Midlands Police Federation to call on the Government to get tough on those who attack police officers and other emergency service workers.

The newly released figures, taken from the force's health and safety statistics, show there were 586 assaults on West Midlands officers in the nine months to the end of September this year.

That compares with 428 assaults in 2012, 483 in 2013, 524 in 2014 and 611 in 2015.

In the same period, officer numbers in the West Midlands reduced by around 2,000.

West Midlands Police Federation's interim chairman, Tom Cuddeford, said: "I am deeply concerned that a growing number of people seem to think it's acceptable to assault police officers."

"Police officers work in their communities, fighting and preventing crime, keeping order and protecting the vulnerable."

"They should be respected for the role they undertake and sadly that respect seems to be lacking in some members of the public."

Legion Poppy dance

LOWER Gornal branch of the Royal British Legion is holding its annual Poppy Dance tomorrow (Friday) at the RBL Club in Ruiton Street at 8pm with tickets costing £4.50.

Dead ringer for a deadly comedy



Graham Morritt and Alex Long in lookalike comedy The Dead Ringer about a Prime Minister's double

STOURBRIDGE Theatre Company is busy preparing for its new political comedy, The Dead Ringer, which is due to hit the later this month at Stourbridge Town Hall.

Directed by Sandra Griswold, the play has similarities to Yes Prime Minister in that when a PM drops dead on the eve of the General Election, minister conspire to hire a lookalike, the 'dead ringer'.

But matters become even more complex when the

actor discovers that the PM's death may not have been of natural causes.

The play is written by Charles Ross and features a cast of seven. Tim French, chairman of Stourbridge Theatre Company, said: "Rehearsals began in August. I think people will enjoy the show because it's a great production and isn't a heavy drama."

The play is staged from November 24 to 26 with tickets on 0336663366 or from www.ticket source.co.uk.

Gas danger warning for people in rented homes

RENTERS in the West Midlands are most at risk from dangerous gas appliances, a new survey has found.

A total of 27 per cent of rented accommodation in the region were found to have unsafe gas appliances.

Now Gas Safe Register, who undertook the survey, is urging home-

owners, landlords and renters to understand where responsibility lies when it comes to gas safety. Other figures show that some 17 per cent of renters in the West Midlands are unaware their boiler should be safety checked annually, and half of these do not think their boiler has been inspected this year.

Jonathan Samuel, of Gas Safe Register, said: "Gas safety can be a matter of life or death. The findings

from the 7,839 inspections carried out by our team in the West Midlands over the last five years show us that more unsafe appliances have been found in rented accommodation in this region than in any other part of the UK."

To find a Gas Safe registered engineer call 0800 408 5500 or visit www.GasSafeRegister.co.uk - if you think there is a gas leak, call free gas emergency number 0800 111 999.



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Lucky Bud – now you ain't nothing but a homed dog!

HE became known as Battersea Dogs & Cats Home's unluckiest dog but Greyhound cross Bud finally has a new home with a Kingswinford family.

Bud had been trying to sniff out a loving family for nearly three years – and now his tail will be well and truly wagging.

Finally, his luck changed for the better when he was rehomed by the Corns family, who spotted him on ITV series Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs.

Ian Corns and his family, who live on Ketley Road, answered Paul's personal plea on the programme for a home for Bud, who is the charity's longest-stay dog, having been with them for more than a thousand days. The average stay at Battersea for a dog is 30 days.

New owner Ian said: "When I saw

Bud on the Battersea programme I couldn't stop looking at him. His character shone through and he reminded me so much of our old collie-cross Rune."

Due to the popularity of the TV programme, Ian had expected Bud would have already been adopted by the time they called. But he wasn't barking up the wrong tree.

He was delighted to discover Bud was still available, and after the family went to meet the dog it was clear thatthey were the ones the lonely mutt had been waiting for, and their application was successful.

The seven-year-old dog has now moved into his new home and is already very much part of the family.

Ian added: "When we lost our collie Rune in January, it felt like a part of the family was missing. Now we have Bud it's complete again."



Bud with his new owners from Kingswinford, Ian Corns and his daughters Eleanor and Abigail

Having a ball with Bob for the Staffies

ROOM for 1 More Stafford Rescue is a Stourbridge-based charity that come to the aid of Staffordshire Bull Terriers who are facing death.

Totally funded by donations, the charity is looking to boost funds for the winter by holding a ball on November 19 at Hagley Golf and Country Club.

The charity's Jude Morgan said: "During the winter months we cannot do outside events so the ball will help us in kennel fees and food for the dogs in our care – and to help us save more who, without us, will be put to sleep."

Guest

Special guest at the fundraiser will be West Bromwich Albion football legend Bob Taylor, who will be available for photographs. There will be raffles and an auction with a signed Albion football up for grabs.

Email jude.fr1m@gmail.com for more information.

Pervert had tried to lure girls into his BMW

A MAN has been found guilty of trying to lure schoolgirls into his car during incidents across the Black Country – approaching two at a popular shopping centre.

A jury at Wolverhampton Crown Court last week found Shawn Jones guilty of four charges of attempted abduction with intent to commit a sexual offence. He had denied all charges.

The 45-year-old, from Norwood Wood, in Brierley Hill, had approached two teenagers outside a KFC restaurant at the Merry Hill shopping centre last summer before trying to get them into his BMW.

One of the victims told a court she thought that she might be raped after Jones told the girls, aged 13 and 14 at the time of the offence, that he loved them.

They had been left in a car outside the restaurant after a friend and her grandfather had gone inside to get food for them all on June 20, 2015.

One of the girls told Wolverhampton Crown Court earlier this week that she had taken her seatbelt off and moved position because she was so scared of what Jones might do.

Jones admitted speaking to the girls but claimed he had just told them to stop giggling and that they should 'behave'.

Singing

He also told police that he had been singing along with his car radio and talking to a friend about a night out when the girls said he was intimidating them.

Jones committed the offence outside KFC while he was on police bail after being charged over two earlier incidents which had involved him talking to young girls while sat in his car. These were in January and April last year.

On January 15, 2015, he was found to have approached a 14-year-old girl who was walking in the Kates Hill area of Dudley. He approached in his car and told the girl that she



Shawn Jones – guilty

was beautiful before offering to drive her around in his car.

And on April 14, 2015, he parked up and told a 12-year-old girl in Slade Road, Cradley, that she was 'good looking' and asked her if she wanted to 'go for a ride'.

When shown CCTV footage from that day, Jones said he was not sure whether the car in the video was his BMW.

However, the number plate had been jotted down by the victims and reported to police.

Prosecutor Mr Simon Phillips said: "He was sexually interested in the girls because of what he said to them."

"He wanted to take them away, to detain them and commit some sort of sexual offence."

"At the very least he attempted to abduct them for an unknown purpose."

Jones will now be put on the Sex Offenders Register and will be sentenced at a hearing held within the next month. He was remanded in custody.

Winter helpline returns

A SCHEME which helps keep more than 800 residents warm has been re-launched in Dudley for the winter.

The scheme is managed by Dudley Council, aiming to help people struggling to keep their homes warm during winter months.

Practical support, information and advice is provided via the winter warmth helpline on (01384) 817086.

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Wolverhampton protesters backing Enoch Powell's right to voice his concerns



How the famous speech was covered by the Express & Star



Protesters out on the streets during the ensuing racial tensions of the late 1960s



Former Wolverhampton Conservative MP, Enoch Powell



A picture of the MP during a trip on the bus in the town

How Powell's Rivers of Blood speech whipped up divisive storm in town

AS new play starts its run in Birmingham, exploring the link between a former Express & Star editor and Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, we take a look through the archives.

The Tory MP's views on mass immigration were already making headlines before he gave his now notorious address which was to unleash a political storm. In the late 1960s Wolverhampton had absorbed a large influx of immigrants, mainly West Indians and Kenyan Asians, and there were increasing fears of racial tension in the town. Mr Powell spoke out about this immigration, particularly the numbers of children arriving and the impact he believed it was having on schools.

At the time, it was reported that immigrant children were arriving at the rate of 25 to 30 a week. But on February 12, 1968, the MP for Wolverhampton South-West was criticised by the National Union of Teachers for 'over-elaborating' the numbers of

MEMORY LANE

Report by Heather Large

immigrant children in Wolverhampton schools and 'making a bad situation worse'.

Mr Powell had spoken to the Walsall Conservatives and told how an MP colleague was 'dumbfounded' when he told him of a constituent whose daughter was now the only white child in her class.

In response, the NUT said it knew of no school with only one white child in a class and Mr Powell was accused by its spokesman of elaborating to make his point.

Discrimination

Powell refused to identify the school when later asked by reporters.

Immigration was becoming a hot topic because the Government was preparing its Race Relations Bill which would prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race in certain areas, particularly housing, where

many local authorities had been refusing to provide houses for immigrant families until they had lived in the country for a certain number of years.

But Mr Powell was 'going to great pains' to highlight what he believed was a growing problem of mass immigration. On February 17, 1968, the Express & Star ran the views of Mr Powell's fellow MPs across the Midlands.

Many agreed he was correct to make a stance, some said it was only fair to control future immigration to help those who are already living in the UK settle in and believed the current levels of immigration should not be sustained.

Labour MP for Rowley Regis and Tipton Peter Archer said: "We live in an overcrowded island."

"We shall have to consider seriously some greater restrictions but this should not distinguish on grounds of race or colour."

Others were a bit more reserved. Julian Snow, MP for Lichfield and Tamworth and parliamentary secretary, said: "I am

fully sensitive to the pressures on schools and housing, but I think the public should guard against being panicked into precipitate action."

On Saturday, April 20, 1968, 16 days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Mr Powell delivered his now famous speech. He tipped off Express & Star editor Clem Jones that he was going to make an address, which he expected to be explosive. He had asked for advice on how to get the best possible publicity for his speeches and had chosen a Saturday afternoon.

As he spoke, he warned of an inflow of 'dependants' and said it was like watching a nation 'busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre'. Calling for an immediate reduction in immigration, he said: "We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual flow of some 50,000 dependants."

* What Shadows, starring Ian McDermid as Enoch Powell and George Costigan as Clem Jones, is at Birmingham Repertory Theatre until November 12.

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Tributes paid as war veteran dies aged 90



Gordon Willetts from Dudley of the Worcesters & Forrester's Association, who has died aged 90

TRIBUTES have been paid to an influential military veteran from the Black Country who has died aged 90 following a period of ill-health.

Gordon Willetts was secretary of the Dudley branch of the Worcester and Sherwood Forester Regiment Association. He leaves behind a wife, three children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

The Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Mohammed Hanif, paid tribute to the veteran, who served in the Worcestershire Regiment and was an influential figure in Dudley borough.

Councillor Hanif said Mr Willetts was 'admired and respected by all'.

He added: "It is with great sadness to hear that Gordon had recently been unwell and passed away last week."

"Gordon was a true gentleman who worked tirelessly for many years to support the efforts of those that had served in conflict - both past and present. He was a great friend to the council and someone that was admired and respected by all those who worked with him. He dedicated many hours of his time to support civic and community events."

Frustration at delay to revamp of bus station

DUDLEY'S development boss says he is frustrated over a lack of progress on a planned revamp of the town's bus station.

It was revealed earlier this year that improvements to the station, as part of a wider £9 million scheme to boost public transport, had been put on hold.

Dudley Council's head of regeneration Khurshid Ahmed said there was 'pressure' on transport bosses at the new West Midlands Combined Authority to come with a plan that can be delivered as soon as possible.

The combined authority has taken over the role of Centro, which previously managed public transport in the West Midlands and had been involved in the bus station scheme.

Council chiefs are desperate to modernise the bus station.

The bus station at Fisher Street is due to be modernised and extended while buses are also due to be upgraded to feature leather seats, wi-fi connections and charging points for mobile phones and tablets.

Uncertainty over the future of the Cavendish House office block and plans to link

By Richard Guttridge

the Midland Metro with Dudley has also contributed to holding the scheme up.

However, Councillor Ahmed said the Metro extension should not be used as an 'excuse' not to start work on the bus station.

He said discussions were planned with transport bosses to try to take the plans forward.

He said: "It has got to start moving. The pressure is on (the combined authority) to come up with something that is fit for purpose, which we have been deprived of for many years."

Pete Bond, director of transport services at Transport for West Midlands, said: "This has to be a scheme that doesn't just work for now, but works for the future growth strategy of Dudley."

O _ _ _ _ _ Y

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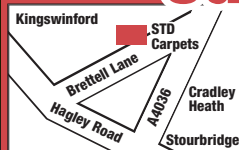
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Malcolm Palmer, aged 81, of Gornal, performed with his ukulele



Sophie Harris, aged 17, with duo Double Trouble, Katie Withers and Daisy Harris



Dance group Remedy from West Bromwich, with choreographer Emily Welborn



Researchers for the show Beth Millard and Conny Batho

Performers put talent to the test

SOME of the Black Country's most talented people took to the stage to impress the judges at Britain's Got Talent regional auditions.

The auditions were held at Brierley Hill Civic Hall on Bank Street, where hundreds of people flocked to show what they could do.

Not only did dancers, singers, musicians and the more unusual acts tread the boards in front of researchers for ITV's hit show, but

dozens of people spent the day watching the acts perform.

One such group that showed they had all the right moves was West Bromwich based dance troupe Remedy.

Medley

The four-piece girl group has only been together for two years, but delivered an impressive performance of street dance to a medley of hip hop and R&B tracks.

Speaking after their performance, Emily Welborn, aged 22, who choreographed the

Report by Jessica Labhart

piece said: "We were really scared before we got on stage, but as soon as we were there, the time seemed to fly.

"We didn't make any mistakes, and we just love dancing together."

One of the judges of the regional auditions was Beth Millard, aged 24, who now lives in London, but is from Coseley.

She said: "We have some really fantastic acts here, from dancers, singers to some

quite surprising acts. It's great doing these smaller regional auditions because you really get to see how talented people are and get to know them and what they're about."

Oldest

Also in the line-up was 81-year-old Malcolm Palmer of Gornal, who performed a rendition of Jimmy Perry's 'Who do you think you are kidding Mr Hitler.'

Malcolm said: "I think I may be the oldest person here. But I really enjoy getting up on stage in front of people and playing my uku-

lele. This is my fourth audition for the show, so I hope I get through to the next round."

Sisters Sophie Harris aged 17 and Daisy Harris aged 11 of Pesnett also attended the auditions. Sophie auditioned on her own, performing her own song 'Look Up' whilst little sister Daisy performed the Christina Perri song 'Jar of Hearts' with friend Katie Withers, aged 11 of Kingswinford.

"The dream is to become a professional musician," Sophie said, "so maybe this will help me on the way, everyone's got to start somewhere!"

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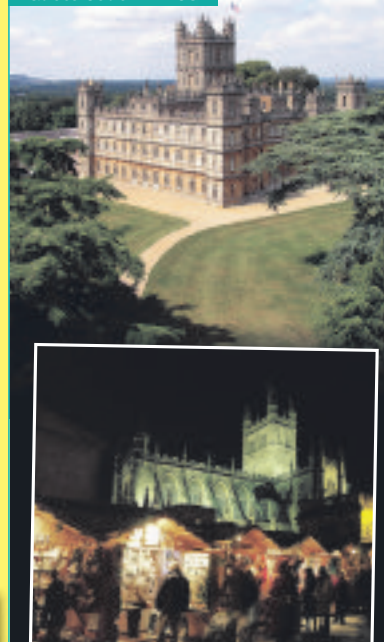
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MP's the driving force for digital workshop

A DIGITAL masterclass was given by Google staff to Black Country businesses and young entrepreneurs.

Experts from Google brought their Digital Garage to Dudley College, after being invited by Dudley North MP Ian Austin.

The internet giant's Digital Garage project is a commitment to provide digital skills training to 200,000 small businesses across the UK by the end of 2016. After meeting with members of Google's team in London, Mr Austin arranged for them to share their knowledge at the event hosted by Dudley College.

Google's lead digital trainer Ade Bangbala shared advice on how firms can use the internet to their benefit.

Mr Austin said: "With the way things are going if we want to attract more investors and companies to the Black Country then these are the skills that are growing and that the hi-tech industries need."

Alongside representatives from local firms, the Google workshop was attended by some of the college's business students.

Delighted

"It was great to see them there too, and we are hoping to arrange for some of the young people to come down to Google's campus in East London."

Debbie Goode, Dudley College's assistant principal marketing & business development, added: "We were delighted to host this event."

"These students attended the Google masterclass because these skills will help them as they look to create their own businesses."



Ian Austin, right, with Ade Bangbala, Google lead digital trainer, and Business Connector Andy Mullaney

Second City derby brings 14 arrests

FOURTEEN arrests were made in the derby between Birmingham City and Aston Villa on Sunday afternoon.

Raids linked to suspected football-related drugs offences were carried out pre-match at three addresses and a 22-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of possession of cannabis.

There were 14 arrests made by West Midlands Police for a range of offences including violent disorder, pitch encroachment and affray.

Police said there were 'pockets' of minor disorder and officers have launched an investigation after flares were thrown inside the ground.

Match commander chief inspector Nick Rowe, said: "There has been a lot of planning in preparation for this fixture and we are pleased the majority of supporters were able to enjoy the game in a safe environment."

"Overall there was a fantastic atmosphere. The majority of fans embraced the feel-good factor of the day and were well-behaved. It was disappointing to have some disorder but we were able to react quickly and make arrests."

National Trust plans to double its curators

THE National Trust has pledged to double the number of curators it employs at its properties after it was accused of neglecting their heritage.

Director general Dame Helen Ghosh announced it will increase the number of curators from 36 to around 65 full time staff over the next two years.

The conservation charity was this week taking over the management of Shugborough Hall and already looks after Wightwick Manor and Moseley Old Hall in Wolverhampton, Kinver Edge and the Rock Houses and the Clent Hills, near Stourbridge.

It now plans to invest more in 'curatorial excellence' than at any time in its history.

Dumbing

But it comes after the trust had previously been criticised for dumbing down its properties after Dame Helen said its historic houses contained too much 'stuff'.

Last year, she said she believed its displays needed to be simplified to make them more appealing to visitors.

At the time Sir Roy Strong, former director of the Victoria & Albert Museum criticised the move, saying: "Under her leadership, the shift down market has accelerated."

But now the trust has announced plans for a new executive role which will 'champion curatorial excellence and deliver exceptional visitor experience'. Dame Helen said they would be tasked with providing ex-

By Heather Lange

periences that 'move, teach and inspire' visitors to its sites including the 300 histories properties in its care.

"We have many curators in the trust who combine deep knowledge of places and collections with flair and imagination in how they are presented to visitors. But we need more of them," she said.

"The new role of director of curation and experience is a critical one for the trust; it will help to marry high standards of scholarship and research with a compelling, inspiring and enjoyable experience for all our visitors."

Sandy Nairne CBE, former director of the National Portrait Gallery and one of the trust's board of trustees said: "This new senior role is a clear sign of the National Trust's commitment to put inspirational curatorship at the heart of how it cares for and interprets its places."

The National Trust also looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside and 775 miles of coastline

Shedding light on heritage of canals

A CANAL tunnel and limestone mines will be the focus of a Festival of Light for the first time this weekend.

The Dudley Canal Trust is inviting visitors to join them on Saturday for a 30-minute boat trip.

The festival is being supported by the Celebrate programme of the Big Lottery Fund.

Visitors will be able to journey underground to discover the Dudley illuminated caverns to celebrate the Black Country's industrial heritage.

Music and light will combine in the tunnels and mines during the boat trips.

Sarah Fellows, heritage activities officer at the Dudley Canal Trust, said: "We are very excited to be holding our first ever Festival of Light."

Boats will depart every half hour from 10.30am to 3pm. No booking will be necessary with visitors allocated seats on a first-come, first-served basis.



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Quirky gift ideas which help protect our wildlife

WILDLIFE charity People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) has released its Christmas gift catalogue, which showcases a variety of quirky and creative gift ideas that will help the most endangered wildlife across the UK and internationally.

This year, new additions include fox-shaped cookie cutters and wildlife-themed ice cube trays – perfect for sweet treats and celebratory drinks throughout the festive season.

There are gifts to suit all budgets and interests, from household items to supporting conservation projects.

£10 could provide enough food for a newly released dormouse couple until they can fend for themselves, £18 could help support the coppicing of hazel trees to ensure there's enough hazelnuts for red squirrels and dormice so they can fatten up for winter.

£30 could help PTES to train forest managers in Indonesia to understand how to help save the Bornean orang-utan.

The full range of wildlife gifts, ideal for any wildlife enthusiast, can be viewed and purchased online at www.ptes.org/shop

All the profits go directly to help wildlife both across the UK and internationally.

Gifts of Nature (prices range from £10 - £100)

PTES has some unique gift ideas in their Gifts of Nature range. 100 per cent of the money raised will help save endangered species worldwide. Gift options include:

- Honeymoon hamper: providing newly released dormice with food until they can fend for themselves in the wild
- Gardener's friend: encouraging the public to create hedgehog holes and connect their gardens to form Hedgehog Highways
- Fighting for survival: educating more people in the conservation of stag beetles
- Winter wonderland: supporting coppicing practices in ancient woodland to help species such as red squirrels and hazel dormice through winter and spring
- Location, location, re-location: relocating the rare pine marten from Scotland to a new lush woodland home in Wales
- Tails of the riverbank: helping save water voles in the UK and boost their numbers by improving their riverbank homes

- Passage to India: working with villagers in India to plan agricultural work around elephant migratory routes & promoting alternative forms of livelihood
- Save orang-utan forest: training forest managers in Indonesia to help protect the Bornean orang-utan from extinction
- Snow leopard patrol: creating new patrol zones across Mongolia so more snow leopards can roam free
- Funky gibbon: training forest rangers to monitor and report illegal poaching of western hoolock gibbons and educating communities to respect this species



Wildlife Guides & Publications

For a comprehensive understanding of Britain's mammals in both the countryside and urban environments, PTES has two concise guides so you can find out more about the wildlife living on your doorstep. Urban Mammals: A Concise Guide and Britain's Mammals: A Concise Guide and are priced at £9.99 each or both for £15.

Animal Ink Cards

Choose from: hare, hedgehog, otter, red squirrel, badger or dormouse cards which are blank inside so you can personalise your message. Size 14 x 14cm on recycled card with a brown recycled paper envelope. Individually packaged and £2.50 each or £12.50 for a set of six.

Native Wildlife Tea Towels

Choose from Animal Ink – beautifully drawn native wildlife, or Collective Nouns including a prickle of hedgehogs! These tea towels are printed by hand in England and made from 100% unbleached cotton and £9 each or £16 for both.

Collective Noun Coasters

Choose from: a trip of hares, a romp of otters and a scurry of squirrels among others. Made in Britain, these quirky coasters are wipeable with a heat resistant matt vinyl print made from eucalyptus hardboard, and are priced at £3 each or 6 for £15.



There's a hypericum for most situations, deciduous or evergreen

Ideal choice to brighten up your rock gardens

BEST OF THE BUNCH – Hypericum

THIS stalwart shrub produces bright yellow flowers throughout summer, followed by berries, depending on the variety.

There's a hypericum for most situations. The larger types look great in a border, the smaller ones will brighten up a rock garden, and you can get both evergreen and deciduous species which provide lovely autumn colour. Certain types will also bear berries. *H. androsaemum* (Tutsan), for instance, a bushy, deciduous shrub which grows up to 75cm tall, produces red berries which ripen to black in autumn. Larger shrubs prefer moist but well-drained soil in sun or partial shade, while the smaller rock garden types prefer full sun and good draining. Trim them in spring to keep them neat or cut the larger deciduous types back hard in early spring to contain their growth.

GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT – Baby vegetables

SO many of these are sold in supermarkets – from baby leeks and miniature courgettes to dwarf carrots and sweetcorn – but you can't beat growing your own.

Some of the shop-bought types have been bred

to be genetically undersized varieties, but you can grow standard types closer together and harvest them earlier. Quick-maturing varieties include early carrots such as Amsterdam Forcing and turnips like Snowball. Leeks like Jolant can be grown in close rows and pulled after 12 weeks, or you could leave them in the ground to become larger, more standard sizes. As a general rule, grow baby vegetables closer together than you would ordinary varieties, although courgettes and sweetcorn will need to be given more space to grow. Thin carrots, beetroot and turnips, leaving them 3cm apart. Space cabbage and lettuce 15cm apart. Baby veg need humus-rich soil, thorough watering and regular feeding but can do well in pots and tiny beds.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

1. Check your greenhouse thermometer regularly and if the minimum temperature has dropped below 3-4C (38-40F) overnight, you may need to turn it up a little.
2. Check stored fruits every week and use them as fast as you can. Remove any showing signs of mould.
3. Plant tulips in gritty, well-drained compost.

A final colourful hurrah before winter takes hold

ROSS UNDERWOOD

Head Gardener at Hodnet Hall



WHENEVER I take a drive around I can open the windows and smell woodsmoke almost everywhere.

Now that days are shorter and cooler it is a privilege to come home and light the stove, yet I come indoors only reluctantly.

Outside in gardens, the countryside and the streets of our towns wherever you look there are bright bonfires happening as plants give their final hurrah before winter.

We are so lucky to live in a temperate climate where we can enjoy autumn colour. Plants that perform at this time of year are to be treasures as the show only intensifies with lower temperatures and light.

Many great trees and shrubs that have been in the background all summer are taking centre stage now.

Amongst the best are the acers. This family which includes the common Sycamore as well as the palmate or Japanese acers. Thanks to the efforts of nurserymen they are no longer just available to the wealthy but come in a huge number of cultivars.

All share common features which are a liking for good loamy soil, a tolerance of shade and a dislike of drought and drying winds. Growth is moderate but the handsome hand shaped (hence the epithet palmate) foliage is perfect for growing herbaceous plants beneath.

One of my favourites is *A. aconitifolium* which as the name implies has foliage reminiscent of a monkshood. It grows as wide as it does tall and can be quite imposing when it gets mature. The leaves burn scarlet red in the autumn and are held over a long period until heavy frost crinkles them up. They look wonderful up deplaned with cyclamen or a small anemone such as 'September Charm' which is still going. *Acer osakazuki* is perhaps the most brilliant of all the Japanese maples and quite a strong grower by comparison with many.

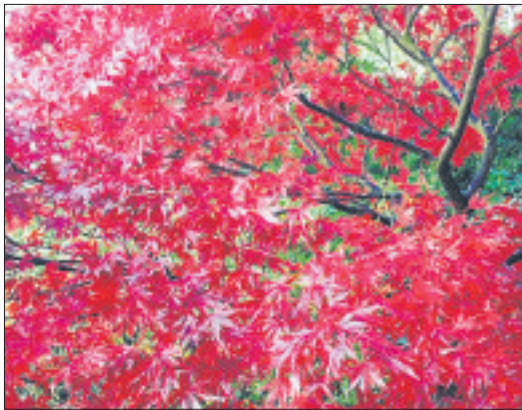
We may not have spared a thought for our cherries since the spring and early summer but look at them now.

Next to my house I am lucky to have a group of bird cherries which are orange, red and gold now. It really looks as though flames are creeping up the tree! Yet for the garden, especially when space is at a premium I like *Prunus incisa*. These more shrubby cherries can have an angular habit of growth. They still flower in early spring but also turn the most fabulous shades of burnt orange and maroon red now. Added to which they are incredibly amenable and will grow in sun or light shade and even in heavy soil which we have here. I have planted the cultivar 'Kojo-no-mai' which is quite slow growing with zig zag shoots and pale pink flowers.

One shrub or tree which is as much of a delight in the hedgerows as it is in the garden are the spindlees, or *Euonymus*. *E. alatus* is often encountered in garden cen-



Lindera obtusiloba has a wonderful erect habit and three lobed leaves which look like molten gold in autumn



Acer osakazuki, perhaps the most brilliant of all Japanese maples



Wonderfully pinkish – *E. bungeanus* var. *mongolicus*

tres where it's neat leaves and winged corky bark give it an extra element of ingest in winter. For those willing to seek them out there are some less often encountered species and cultivars including the wonderful *E. bungeanus* var. *mongolicus* which has wonderfully pinkish autumn colour with pinkish fruits produced after a good summer. *E. ciliicola* is a graceful shrub growing to ten feet with slender leaves whilst *E. hamiltonianus* has produced a number of excellent offspring including 'Indian Summer' and 'Coral Charm' which are must-haves in my book!

Lindera is a genera of shrubs from the northern hemisphere which might not have been heard of outside of specialist collections some few years ago but have made a much greater impression recently. *L. benzoin* is known as the spice bush in the USA has scented leaves which turn clear yellow in autumn. My favourite though is *L. obtusiloba* which has a wonderful erect habit and three lobed leaves which look like molten gold in autumn.

I feel as though I could go on forever and probably could but I can't leave you without mentioning a conifer... yes a conifer that I

find irresistible. You might have to give up a substantial part of your garden to house it so it's probably better to go and see it in somebody else's but hey ho! There are only five genera of deciduous conifer of which *Pseudolarix amabilis* is the only member of its own genera and superficially resembles a larch. It likes acid soil in which it will grow slowly but happily producing long light green needles which look like butter in the autumn.

They make a stately tree over time and ours is just a baby but here's to many golden Octobers to come!

fast the ticket

Taking Pride Star on the stage – Page 19



Rae of light
See Page 19



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